

SWEET WILLIAM,

OR THE CASTLE OF MOUNT ST. MICHAEL.

By *Marquerite Bowet.*

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued).

Yes, they were very happy in the Great Tower these two little cousins; and nurse Mathilde declared it was the sweetest pleasure she had ever known to watch them as they sat all the long autumn afternoons with their young heads together, talking and laughing as only children can—Constance always animated, wild, impulsive; while Sweet William remained calm and serene, with only the wondering expression in his grave sweet eyes as he listened to the many stories that Constance had stored in her young memory.

There was one tale he always liked to hear better than all the rest; and that was the one about the old peasant who lived at the foot of the Mount, who had said that my lady resembled her pretty young mother. Constance related how the old man had lived these years all alone in his little hut, watching and waiting for a ship that never came; how his children and his grandchildren had all died, save one, who, being a brave and trusty seaman had gone to man a ship which years ago had taken an unhappy lady from Mount St. Michael; and how the good sailor had promised the Norman people, who loved the lady dearly, that he would never show his face in Normandy again if he failed to pilot her safely back to her own country; and the weeks and the months and the years had rolled by, and no ship had ever returned, and no sailor ever brought news of a safe voyage. But love and hope are stronger than the wildest tempest; and the old Norman was still waiting and watching at the foot of the Mount for this last of all his loved ones. She told how the light was left burning every night against the good sailor's return, and how the old man would often mistake the moaning of the wind or the murmur of the waves for the voice of the absent one, and with faltering steps and anxiously beating heart would go to the door of his little hut, only to let in the cold and darkness of night.

Sweet William always sighed after listening to this story of patient love, and said,—

"I wonder what became of the lady, Constance, and whether the ship will ever come back."

But Constance could not tell, and William's tender heart ached for the old man when he learned that his years of waiting had been as many as those of his own young life; and that to him seemed very long.

Then there was old Mother Anne, for whom Sweet William had conceived a lively interest. A remarkable person she seemed to him, from all the accounts he had of her. Constance had said that she possessed two pairs of eyes, one of which she used to look into the future. And it was certain that she made good use of them both, for she not only knew everything that went on in the village, but could tell all that would happen in years to come, they said. This rare gift William often coveted. How gladly would he have used those far-seeing eyes to look into his own mysterious future and what a deal of wondering they would have saved him about himself! He often tried to imagine what prophecies Mother Anne would have in store for him, and secretly wished he might beguile her into revealing some of her wisdom. But Mother Anne, like most people who have a talent, was choice of it, and never displayed it except on rare occasions. Even my lady thought her a little disobliging for never entering into the free and confidential talks with her which she liked so much from her elders. And when she once asked the old woman to teach her some of her wily arts, Mother Anne had only replied with a low chuckle,—

"He who knows nothing, fears nothing."

But as Constance feared nothing, and knew a great deal for a little girl, she was somewhat disgusted with Mother Anne's logic.

Still, the old woman was very fond of the pretty child, her saucy prattle notwithstanding; and her son, a burly young peasant, had spent much time and care in training the famous Ixe as a gift from that worthy dame to my little lady on her feast day. It was rather a dubious thing in those days to receive a gift from such a

questionable personage as Mother Anne; especially as good or ill fortune was supposed to attend the gift, according to the manner in which it was given. But on this occasion Mother Anne had not committed herself; she had only said in her mystifying tones,—

"A light heart and a happy lot are yours, my pretty lady; but look you! should Ixe die before the year, you are in danger of losing both. Take care of him, good care of him, my little elf!" which harrowing prophecy caused Lasette to spend many an anxious and sleepless night. As for Constance, she always took the greatest care of her bird—not on account of Mother Anne's words, which were riddles to her, but because she was fond of him, as she was of every living thing that came within the reach of her loving nature.

At last the brown autumn died away, and the cold winter came; and the gray mists rose above Mount St. Michael, and the white snow fell quietly, burying everything beneath it, and making the lonely landscape around Sweet William's Bower even more bleak and desolate. But none of the dreariness without ever found its way into the gray chamber now. There was always laughter and merry-making going on within; and although it had once been the gloomiest dungeon on Mount St. Michael, it was now lighted up with the sunshine of love and youthful graces, and often made bright and beautiful.

The days were all too short, and even the long evenings came to an end much too soon for the happy little cousins; for it was then that Guilbert, sitting very straight in his high-backed chair, related his wonderful stories, and delighted the ears of Sweet William and Constance with his marvellous adventures. The good old fellow had kept a boyish heart, his white hairs notwithstanding; and his thrilling recitals were scarcely less a delight to himself than to the children. For he had a remarkable memory, had Guilbert, for things that never happened or that happened so long before his time that he was hardly expected to have any recollection of them. It must be confessed that in his excitement he often grew sadly confused, and jumbled up his dates in a way that would have made any historian's hair turn white.

The artless William always listened intently, with his sweet, trustful, unquestioning smile, and his dark eyes filled with a look of innocent wonderment; but Constance, whose knowledge of events was vast in comparison, was often moved to shameful doubt, especially when Guilbert dwelt at length on his intimacy with William the Conqueror, or told what active part he took in the ravagings of the early Northmen, or even went so far as to hint at his having been one of the brave Roland's band—forgetting, apparently, that though the fame of these great heroes lives for ever, their poor bodies had been lying in their rocky graves for centuries.

"Guilbert must be very old," Constance would conjecture. "Do you think, Sweet William, he could have seen the awful dragon that used to roam about Mount St. Michael before our great fortress was built?"

But Sweet William had never heard of the great dragon that roamed about Mount St. Michael; and Constance was fain to relate to him the old legend, which Nurse Lasette had repeated so many times that the little girl had it all by heart.

"It is strange to think of it, Sweet William," said she; "but once upon a time there was nothing on this high mount but gray rocks and great lonely trees growing in among them—no abbey nor castle, and no one living near it for miles around. The people were afraid of it because this fearful dragon was hidden away under the topmost rock; and at dusk he came out and wandered about the mount, and ate up anybody he chanced to meet. He was the terror of all the country, but especially of the poor mariners, who were sure whenever they heard his terrible laugh that some great danger was ahead. Think, cousin, how curious to hear a dragon laugh! A dragon is a dreadful creature with wings and a monstrous tail and a very unpleasant face. One would never think that he could laugh. The people were very sorry about this dragon; but most of all a good old bishop who lived near by, and who had prayed much to the blessed saints that the monster might be

destroyed. One night the bishop had a strange dream; the archangel Michael came to him and said, 'Go to the highest rock of the mount and slay the dragon and there build a church in my name.' When the good bishop awoke he was glad indeed to find it was only a dream; for though he was anxious to be rid of the dragon, he would rather some one else did the slaying while he did the praying. But the second and the third night he had again the same dream; till at last Saint Michael struck him on the head with his thumb; and left a little round mark in his skull where no hair ever grew again. After that the good bishop did as he was told; and think of his terror, William, when he reached the top of the mount! The huge beast flapped its wings, and opened its great jaws as if it would swallow him whole; but he was brave now, for the good angel was near him, and as he raised his sword the dragon laughed one of his horrid laughs and fell down dead. Then the bishop laid the first stone on the place where the dragon fell, and after that a little church was built, and the mount called Mount St. Michael in honor of the archangel. And ever since Saint Michael has been the patron saint of France and Normandy."

"If it were not for the mark of the saint's thumb," observed Sweet William pensively, "I would almost think Guilbert were that bishop; it is like some of the brave deeds he did in his youth. Guilbert has been so many things, Constance, is it not possible he might have been a bishop?"

But Constance, upon second consideration thought not; for though Guilbert possessed an ample circular baldness on the top of his venerable head which would have been testimony enough for him, all this had happened so many hundred years ago—no one knew exactly how many—that she felt certain Guilbert could claim no share in it.

"And then," she went on, "the castle

was built, and the little church was made into the large and beautiful abbey that it is now, by the powerful dukes of Normandy. There is a picture of the good archangel there, and you should see it, dear William—such a heavenly face when the sunshine falls on it through the purple and crimson windows! I can almost think he is looking straight at me and saying, 'I am the patron of little children; I love and protect them all.' Have you never seen the face of the good Saint Michael, William.

"Surely no, dear Constance; I do not understand. How may one see the face of those who are not on earth?"

"O Sweet William dear," said my lady laughingly, "you can see the portrait of any one—even of persons who are not living now, or who never were on earth at all."

"And what is a portrait like?" inquired Sweet William innocently.

(To be Continued.)

THE SNOW PLANT OF THE SIERRAS.

The California snow plant here shown is from a photograph sent to the *Scientific American* by Mr. Taber of San Francisco. It is called the snow plant because it thrusts its stem up through the snow to a height of nine or ten inches, and flowers when no other vegetation is to be seen. This curious plant, which belongs to the order Ericaceæ, is allied to the *Pine drops* (*Pterospora*), but has much larger flowers, an elongated style and wingless seeds. There is but one species (the one here figured), which is an erect herbaceous parasite, with succulent, scale-like leaves, and a long raceme of pendulous flowers. The whole plant is of a blood-red color.

YOU CAN'T STOP your neighbor's tongues, but you can stop your own ears.

